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The individualized method of teaching reading is being used in schools throughout the country, and more and more schools are beginning to try it. The monograph was prepared to help those interested in individualized reading to understand the method, the problems which may arise, and how it compares, in detail, with the method of group reading.

Individualized reading implies that the children are seated at their desks in a classroom, each with a different book he has selected. Each child receives individual help from the teacher and participates in sharing what he has learned with the other children. The individualized method assumes that "special need" groups will be used to learn certain skills such as phonics.

Problems discussed include teacher control over the class, class size, and the supply of enough books to support the program. There are no clear solutions, but satisfactory results have been achieved through ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Experiments to measure the comparative value of individualized reading to group reading have not led to a decisive conclusion because of the difficulty in comparing equal teachers working equally hard, children of equal background and intelligence, equal time and emphasis, and equal class sizes. Such results as the growth of children's enthusiasms for reading because of the individualized method are measured. It seems likely that both methods will take a place in the repertory of a skilled reading teacher.

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INDIVIDUALIZED READING vs. GROUP READING

By Edward W. Dolch, Ph. D.

Educational Materials Laboratory
Office of Education

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DEPARTMENT OF
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E. W. Dolch

Individualized Reading vs. Group Reading I

The individualized method of teaching reading is being used in schools throughout the country, and more and more schools are thinking of trying the method. We are also discovering that some schools and many teachers have used individualized reading for many years. Everyone interested in reading should therefore understand what individualized reading implies, and the problems that arise if this method is to be used. He should also understand how it compares, in detail, with the method of group reading.

A Definition

Individualized reading implies at least five different things. *First,* the children are at their seats or at reading tables. They are not in a group before the teacher. *Second,* each child has a different book—a book that he himself selected. This is very different indeed from the group system, with each child having the same book, open at the same place.

Third, each child receives individual help from the teacher or a teacher's helper, the help that he needs just when he needs it. This is very different from the method of giving help to groups, which assumes that most or many of them need the same thing at the moment. *Fourth,* the individualized method of teaching reading always assumes a "sharing period," during which each individual child shares something of what he has learned with other children, either the whole room or part of it.

Fifth, individualized reading always assumes that certain skills have to be taken up with the class as a whole, or in a group session with the part of the class which needs to learn the skill. The group method of teaching reading also uses such sessions for special skills, such as sounding skills. These "special need" groups are recommended, of course, for all teaching of reading.

Control of the Room

We know, of course, that children learn to read by many methods. Our concern, therefore is whether some one method is better than some other method, since we wish to use the best. In considering the individualized reading method, we must therefore inevitably compare it with the more general method used, the grouping method, which nearly always assumes for reading purposes, three groups of children to the room.

Since a teacher must, first of all, hold control of the behavior of her children in the room, many teachers are fearful that this new method may hinder or make more difficult the teacher's problem of control. To understand this situation fully, we must consider that there are three different methods of control, all of which are in constant use in the classroom.

Teacher control is always present to a greater or lesser extent in every room in school. The "felt presence" of the teacher keeps the children from showing conduct which might be harmful to the good behavior of the room or to the learning going on there. This teacher control is often felt to be the result of the children's watching the teacher. If the child has his eyes fixed

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The late Dr. Dolch, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Illinois, resided in Santa Barbara, California, until his death in October.

on the teacher, he feels her controlling presence. In addition, we all know that the teacher's voice plays a large part in this control. The teacher is speaking, asking questions or giving suggestions a large part of the time, some studies show two-thirds of the time. Every child in the room hears that voice, whether he is sitting before the teacher in a reading group or sitting at his desk doing some assigned task. This "voice of authority" has its effect. The practical question is, will individualized reading lessen or lose this teacher control?

We know that in the individualized reading method, the children will not be sitting facing the teacher in a group. We know that she will be giving individual help in a low voice, maybe at her desk or at a table, or in some part of the room. What about her control of the situation?

The answer to this question is, of course, *interest control.* Each child will have a book of his own choice, one he *can* read and one that he *wants* to read. The book will keep him busy. He will not want to do anything else. There will be no temptation for mind wandering, for hidden occupations, for disturbing others. If book selection is really managed rightly, interest control takes the place of the usual teacher control.

Here we might add, that under the individualized system, the teacher is freed from having to maintain group control in front or back of the room. As she gives individual help, she can look about and watch what is going on. If interest control is not working with a certain child, she can go to him and see what is wrong. This is what the teacher, even with a group in front of the room, has to do sometimes with the children at their seats. But to leave the reading group does not help morale, and under the reading group system children at their seats are usually left to their own devices. But in individualized reading, the teacher can attend to everyone. Thus she is really released for the most effective teacher control.

A third method of control, *routine control,* works for both systems. We know that children are now trained for the group system. They know how to come and go, how to handle books, how to react in the group situation. But it is just as possible to establish routine for the individualized system. Children quickly learn how to choose books, how to read them, how to get help, and so on. Routine control is very valuable, and it works with any definite system.

Size of Class

Size of class is often brought up as a problem with the individualized system. But we must certainly ask what happens to the group system of teaching reading when there are too many in the room, say forty or more. Such a large number does one of two things. It may force division of the room into perhaps four groups. This means that each group gets only one-fourth or less of the teacher's time. It also means that three-fourths of the children are sitting at their seats three-fourths of the time, without teacher help. Such a situation results in very poor learning of reading.

The other possibility is that each of three groups will consist of one-third of forty, or of a dozen or more. What does a teacher do with a dozen children before her, all supposed to be looking at the same page of the same book? If one child reads or speaks, that means that eleven are waiting. The individual differences between a dozen children in any such group are enormous. In reading ability forty children will spread over five to seven grades. A third of them will spread over two or three grades. How can the group method work in that situation? We know that it rarely does work for every one of the children.

In contrast, forty children can be taught by the individualized method by providing more books and some added helpers. Each child still reads at his level and on his interest. His individual help can come from the teacher or from helpers who are in the same grade or a higher one.

Even if little individual help is possible, the child still learns by reading *"about his interest at his level."* He cannot help but learn under the drive of interest. So the problem of too large a class is harmful to any class, no matter what the teaching method, but it is less harmful in the individualized situation.

A Comparison on "Learning How to Read"

Learning to read actually means many specific learnings. The teacher knows this because she must teach these specific things. Therefore we must compare these two methods according to the different specific learnings that must take place.

Liking to read is the most important learning that any child can secure from the school. If the child likes to read, he will struggle until he learns how to read and to read well. If he does not like to read, he is sure to learn slowly and will never become very good at reading because he just will not practice reading. He will not follow the newspaper. He will not learn from magazines and books. In short, our efforts are fruitless unless he not only *can* read but *likes* to read.

We all know the situation with the group system. By it, great numbers of children learn to read and learn to like to read. We have many materials and methods planned to this end. But let us be frank and admit that under the group system many children do *not* learn to read. And under that system, many children who do learn how to read also learn to dislike reading. This dislike appears forceably in high school and in college. A recent study showed that of all adults, about one-fifth said they had never read a book that they were not compelled to read. Such is a really dreadful result. So the group system may point with pride to its successes, but is must also point with sorrow to its failure.

In contrast, those teachers who have tried the individualized system report unanimously that nearly every child comes to like to read. Each child has a book he can read, and not one that frustrates him. Each child has a book that he chose himself, and not that was chosen for him. And each child can go at his own pace, without humiliating comparisons with another child who is going faster.

As a result, it is everywhere reported that children who have disliked reading change their minds. It is reported that maladjusted children change their attitudes and fit in with the group in other activities. Everywhere it is reported that the children do quantities of reading, not only the good readers but all of them. Even the good readers do more reading and make more progress because they are not held back by slower children.

On this first and most important aspect of learning to read, the individualized system seems vastly superior to the present one.

Sight vocabulary is the second basic element in learning reading. Everyone reads with his sight vocabulary, that is, by his instant recognition of the words frequently met with. To teach sight vocabulary, the standard textbooks are elaborately organized. First, the vocabulary is strictly controlled, so that new words are "doled out" a few at a time and then frequently repeated. Second, for the first three years at least the manual tells the teacher how to teach every word. So through this teaching alone, it would seem that the vocabulary used in the books

would become sight vocabulary. Third, during the reading lesson the teacher has the text read aloud one or more times, so that all the children hear the words and so could be matching the sound with the printed text.

Through these three methods, it is hoped that all the words of the first three years, or about 1,500, will be learned by every child. If this happened, we would have no poor readers in fourth grade, since 1500 words would cover most of the commonly used words of the language. But we know that somehow or other, many children do not learn the primary vocabulary as sight vocabulary. Many do not learn 1500 but only 500. Many learn less. We should surely have some study of how this happens, but our work in remedial reading tells us that it does.

The individualized method has three methods for teaching sight vocabulary (along with other things). The first of these can be called the "Reading-to-the-teacher" system. That is, as the teacher sits at her desk or at a table she calls one child after another to come up and read to her from his book. As he does so, she can tell him the words he does not know. This telling is effective for two reason. First, he *wants* to know the word to get the story. Second, he is *told individually,* and not as one of a group.

The second method in individualized reading can be called the "Teacher-moving-around" method. That is, when a child comes to a word he cannot figure out, he raises his hand to call the teacher. He does not stop reading, however, but, with raised hand, goes on reading until she gets to him. When the teacher comes to him, he points to the word or words he has not figured out, and she can tell them to him or use other methods, in either event, adding them to his sight vocabulary if he remembers them.

A third method is called the "Help-one-another" method. This requires that student-helpers are appointed in the room or come to the room from a higher grade. These helpers tell the children who raise their hands the words they need, usually not trying to do anything but that. Or the children in the room can be so seated that each child has a helper across the aisle from him. (A helper chosen by him, and not imposed by someone else.) When the child comes to an unknown word, he puts his finger under the word, leans across the aisle, is told the word, and goes on. This "help-one-another" method is also used for "seat reading" in schools employing the usual group method of teaching reading, and it is very effective. It not only teaches reading but teaches the more important thing, that we can and should help one another.

One important point must be made about this help with vocabulary. It must be assumed that by the individualized method, each child has chosen a book that is *close to his level.* This means that there are *not too many hard words.* Ideally, there should not be more than three unknown words per page, since we know that if a child is told too many new words, he will not remember any of them. If the books chosen are too hard, skipping will inevitably result, and wrong habits will be cultivated. In comparison, as we watch reading groups, we find that many of the children meet ten to twenty or more new words per lesson. Even if they are told them all, they can't remember so many. So "a book suited to the child" is a basic rule of individualized reading.

Before leaving sight vocabulary, we should add one comment. We now know that it is not necessary to learn the common words altogether from reading in books. We know which the common words are. We know that children can learn them

by interesting games. So if the usual teaching of sight words in teaching does not work entirely with some children, no matter whether by the group method of the individualized method, we can have those particular children learn sight words through the interest of a game and therefore discover that they know them when they meet them in reading.

Guessing. Any child, when reading, may come to a word he does not know and just guess some word that fits in with the context and go on. We all know that when the teacher with a group before her says, "Read it to yourselves," many of the children do this guessing. Theoretically, they should sound out every word that they do not recognize. But many just do not know that much sounding, and others find it too much trouble. Likewise, most children are sure that they have guessed right because the word they thought of fitted in to the meaning and even began just like the word they were wondering about.

Now it is believed that in the group system, these bad guesses are caught and corrected when the children hear the passage read aloud later on. This can hardly be so because we know that many children are not paying attention, and that even if they catch the error that they made, they do not remember what the right word was. We can easily show this by having the poor readers reread any passage that has just been read aloud. So it is not realistic to assume that the group system of reading catches and corrects all wrong guesses.

In the individualized system, the children will surely do a lot of guessing. They have an interesting book. They want to know what the story is. They want to get ahead. So the temptation to "guess and go on" is very great. In this situation, there are two possibilities. One is that the unknown word will block the story and so the child will want to find out what it says. In this case he will sound or raise his hand. Or if, at the moment, he is reading to the teacher, she will tell him or help him sound. The other possibility is that what he guesses will seem to fit in and he will go on, just as he would in any reading.

Sounding. No child becomes a reader unless he learns how to sound out words for himself. Sounding is absolutely necessary for reading from the middle grades on for the rest of life. So an important question about any system is, "Does it teach sounding?"

First, we must admit that our group reading system is a rather dismal failure when it comes to teaching sounding. Sounding is supposed to be taught in the primary grades. But we find in the middle grades that about half cannot sound, and so we have a sounding program in the middle grades. Still we find in high school that a fourth or a fifth of the children cannot sound.

This obvious failure of the regular system has caused schools to buy supplementary phonics workbooks by the millions. It has caused the development of phonic games. It has caused the use of a special sounding period all through the primary grades or later. The fact seems to be that having a small group of children sitting in front of the teacher, (the rest at the seats), going through the prescribed steps given by the manual, does not successfully teach sounding to all.

How does the individualized reading system compare with this standard system? We have said that the standard system must have a special phonics period. So apparently must the individualized system. The reason is that phonics must get special and concentrated attention. It does not get this either in group reading or in individualized reading. So under any

system let us have the special study of phonics. We also need, in any system, the special workbooks, games, charts and so on.

Aside from this use of a special period, how does the new system compare with the old? The question really is, How, in either of the two systems, is the child pushed or impelled to use what sounding knowledge he *has*, and thus be led to discover more sounding knowledge? In the group system, the pressure is caused by the teacher sitting before him, who is doubtless going to ask him to read aloud. So he must, in "reading silently," do his best to figure out the words. That is the theory. But in practice, many pupils know there is little chance they will be called on to read aloud. If there are ten to fifteen children in the group, only a few can read very much; if all are to read, they can read only one sentence. In addition, the chances are the teacher will call on the good reader and then will call on the poor reader to reread, and the poor reader can remember enough of what he has heard to "read" successfully.

In the individualized method, the pressure is almost entirely from the book. We have here the "job control" that we have spoken of. The child has an interesting book. To get the story of the facts, he must know what the book says, that is, what the words say. So the theory is that he tries to use all the sounding knowledge he has. Now we must admit that the child can skip. But the chances are that he will use the sounding *that he knows well*. We all use the knowledge that we know well. We do *not* use the knowledge of which we are uncertain. So the situation here is not much different from what it is in any reading, group or otherwise. The child will practice what he knows. This may cause him to learn new sounding principles by discovery, which is the best learning. But most sounding will have to come in the sounding period.

Many teachers use their conferences with individual children to teach sounding. This is a fine idea, because each child needs different teaching, and this conference can adapt perfectly what one is taught. A teacher may point out just one new principle to each child. She cannot do more because of time. But does she need to do more? If each child learns every day just one new principle, and a principle that the reading demands and that he wants to learn, would not that be ideal? Soon each would make tremendous progress. For we must admit that in group teaching, much of the sounding taught is "for the other fellow," since all the children are at different points in developing sounding knowledge and skill.

Skills in reading. We all know that just "telling what you have read" is a minimum in reading that we do not wish to be our total goal. We want the children to know what they have read, and then we want them to think about what they have read in various ways which have been called "thought getting or study skills." That is, we want them to realize why certain details are given. We want them to decide what a paragraph is really about. We want them to be able to find the framework of the writer's story or discussion, in other words, to make a rudimentary outline. And we want them to learn how to appreciate.

Here we must admit that many of the kinds of thinking that we have just listed are more or less automatic with children who are interested in what they are reading. If they are interested, they will react with comments, with criticism and with appreciation. So we must not assume that a child reading alone does *no* thinking. But we also know that this kind of

thinking and appreciation can be stimulated in anyone. So how is this stimulation to be given by the individualized reading method?

In the primary grades appreciation is taught through discussion of the stories which the children report on during the sharing period. That is the time to ask questions about why we like a story, about the author's picturing, about the thoughts and feelings of the characters, and so on. The discussion by the group of one child's report will lead all the children to understand what they are to look for. Then when another child makes a report, one will immediately see that he is being guided by the previous discussion of other children's stories. So individual stories and characters are discussed by the group, and all are guided thereby just as they are in group method. This means, of course, that time must be taken for literary appreciation if one wishes literary appreciation to be prominent. Just as much time must be taken in individualized work as in group work. There is no difference.

In the middle and upper grades, there is presumed to be some special time and thought given to literature. Here it will be found that more than one child will read such a book as Robinson Crusoe. If it is "appreciated" at one sharing-time, others will want to read it. Then it will be discussed again. This does not mean that all will read the same book. The idea that any one book can be suitable for all to appreciate is no longer believed in. Attempts to get a whole group to think and feel about one book at the same time have been a dismal failure. It results very often in many of them disliking the book.

One method of developing appreciation is for the children who have read the same book to discuss it among themselves and to come to some conclusions which they report to the others. They might even dramatize part of it. If every child is involved sooner or later in such an appreciation group, with teacher guidance, all could share the benefit and avoid the harms of reading standard books.

Of course, the whole class can study and discuss any classics that are considered desirable. Individualized reading assumes that for special purposes, group study is desirable. So this might well be one of the special purposes.

Study or analysis of study material may lead to the same kind of sharing and discussion. For instance, a child who reads a chapter on "tunnels" can well be asked questions by the others and thus all would find that in reading, you have to find out certain kinds of things, you may make an outline, you may find a summary, you can select outstanding statements, and so on. So reporting and discussing factual material during sharing time gives all the chance any group has for analysis technique.

We can very well point out, however, that there need not be too much time taken for this in reading. Are not the children taking content subjects? Are they not studying geography or science, or other subjects? Those content subjects give every opportunity for the methods of analysis or study of content material. All of the children are taking up the same material, and they are all made interested in it. Then all can learn this skill that they can learn from any reading, and do it much better than in a reading lesson.

Workbooks. Traditionally, reading has been divided into many special skills, and workbooks have been prepared to teach each one of these skills. The introductory pages of these workbooks often list ten to fifteen skills supposed to be taught by the workbook, with a few pages for each.

Some persons wish to use this idea of

practice on separate skills in individualized reading, and there is no reason why they should not do so. In fact, they can do so better than ever. Formerly, we had a whole class practice the same thing, whether some individuals needed this practice or not. With the individualized method, the teacher, in conferring with a single child, can see just what he needs and can assign him at once just the practice book or the practice pages she thinks he needs. So all practice can be adapted to the individual. For this work, the teacher can assemble a wide range of workbooks, covering many skills and many grades. Then she can assign a single workbook to a child who needs it, thus getting many children to work on many workbooks, but each with a workbook suited to him individually.

In individualized reading, will all learn the same content from their reading?

This question may seem illogical. Reading is a skill. Why do we ask about content? The reason is simple. Read the manuals of all the readers. Notice the amount of time taken up with *discussion of the content* of the reading matter. If the story is about a kind of animal, the children study about that animal. If it is about an apartment house, the children study about apartment house living. If it is about butterflies, the children study about butterflies. In fact, many persons have criticized our so-called teaching of reading as being chiefly teaching of content. They say that to listen to a reading lesson, one would hear everything else but reading.

The defense of this emphasis on content is that the standard readers are carefully built to include all features of normal child and community life. The children *need* to learn about home life, about pets, about the community helpers, and so on and on. They *need* to learn about food, about health, about transportation, about manners, about clothing, about different races, etc. So the *standard readers are skillfully prepared curricula of material that children need to know about and to think about.*

The value of the content of readers is fully admitted. The only comment needs to be that if *all* the children of any grade need to learn this content and think about this content, why are not all the children in a room learning about it together? Why do we have "different rates of progression" which lets part of the children learn about a pet animal in September, another part of the children learn about it a month later, and another part in February, perhaps if the *content* of the readers is basic, there seems to be no excuse for separation into "progress groups," for all can "learn the content" at the same time.

Or what about the practice of adopting three basic readers for a room, and so having different sections of the children learning different content? In fact, arguments for content are arguments for "all children reading the same book at the same time." One company admits this problem and issues the same content at two different levels of reading difficulty. Other companies do not even mention it.

The argument for content has caused some teachers to have the whole room attack a new unit in the basic reader all together. It is treated as content. All talk about it. All contribute experience. All look up pictures or make trips, or what not. Then, when it comes to reading, the rapid readers are excused because they have already read the book. They go and read harder material. The slow readers are excused too and they go to read easier material. So the content of the basic is used for all as content, not as reading. This is a logical attack on the problem.

Let us turn now to individualized read-

ing. Obviously all are reading different content unless the teacher has been skillful enough to get the class to work around topics and has been able to get a wide variety of books on one topic. In that case, all are reading on the same subject. Usually, however, this is not possible. Usually all have different topics for reading.

In this case, the only possible way of getting content of the reading to more than one person is to have children tell what they have read. This can be done in small groups. It can be done to some extent for the whole room. But this is language, not reading, and the teacher immediately has to learn how to manage an oral language lesson. She must decide who is to "tell." She must manage the telling by supplying a subject such as "an interesting thing I found out," or "an exciting point in a story," or "a wonderful person I read about," or the like. She must develop standards for telling and for listening. All of this will be found in books on oral language in school. But it is not given in reading books. Without special management at this point, the "sharing" that is often used may be harmful, as it may produce only boredom and difficulty.

One third grade teacher tells her own reaction to the loss of the common content when all the children are reading individually. "I feel that the greatest loss in individualized reading is in talking about the story together, sharing ideas and experiences. Emotions shared in literature make precious moments and fond memories. I missed the laughs together over many of these stories, the concern we would have felt together for certain characters, the wisdom of young minds and opinions given candidly." That is a real lament. But one fears that it is an ideal group situation that is being talked about, not one in which some children are twice as good readers as other, and in which some are bored and some are frustrated. Let us remember the ideal, but realize the practical.

Social Learning. Do children get social learning from individualized reading?

Here we had better be quite clear as to what the present situation is. What social learnings does the group method teach? Here we have one set of learnings arising *from the use* of groups. And we have another set *within any group.*

First, the social learnings from the division of a room into groups is very unfortunate. By this division, one group of children are labeled average, a thing which will not hurt them perhaps unless they individually think they are superior. Adults try to avoid thus being labeled as they know if they are called "superior teachers," or "superior workers" in a plant, the others immediately resent them. A barrier is set up between them and others. Are children any different? Finally, one group of children is marked inferior, and they are usually called "dummies" by some of the children. The teacher may not hear this, but the children do. And these same children often hear it from their parents and from their brothers and sisters. Ask the children themselves and you will find out all about it. Is this social situation good?

Second, if one watches a group reading lesson, what are the social learnings? If there is a friendly and skillful teacher, the children may work quite as equals, not conscious of differences in reading ability or mental ability. If the teacher is not so successful, the children are constantly comparing themselves with others, and are very conscious that "I know" and "you don't know" and so on. The essence of the situation is this comparing. There is *competition* rather than *cooperation.* And any competition may produce poor social learnings. One of the arguments

often given for having a slow group is that the poor reader is slighted in the average group and is glad to escape from this slighting by being put in a group where the others are like himself. But does he escape from slighting on the playground? And in this new group, is there not "slighting" on another scale, for the slow group are not all equally slow? Some in the slow group look down on others in it.

In individualized reading, it is said there is not this comparison and competition. This is not entirely so, for the children know who is reading a hard book and who is reading an easy book. Yet if each is enjoying himself, he is not going out of his way to make comparisons such as are inevitable if each is looking at the same page. In general, then, competition is largely avoided, and energy is released for other things.

So much for the competition side of the picture. *But what about cooperation?* Individualized reading tends to avoid the evils of competition, but how can it provide the benefits of cooperation? With a group, teachers are often able by the group method to get a high spirit of cooperation. How can they get cooperation in individualized reading? Here we must refer to the situation mentioned a while back, that of getting several children to read on a single topic. In this way interest can be built up, and if the teacher can provide books on a single topic but at different reading levels, she can get remarkable cooperation between readers of different levels. Most rooms using individualized reading are also using units of activity or projects of some kind. These units or projects can be carried over into the reading, and so cooperation is going on, even though the various children interested in a topic may be reading different books.

Individualized Reading vs. Group Reading II

Individualized reading is not recreational reading

Recreational reading is put into the program for two distinct purposes. The *first* is to teach children that reading is fun and that there are lots of interesting books. These things are taught by providing many easy interesting books, and letting the children read freely from them, without direction as to what they "must read" and without questioning. There may be voluntary comments or reports or other reactions, but recreational reading is for fun. This is its purpose, and a wonderful purpose too. Nothing is allowed to interfere with that purpose.

The *second* purpose of recreational reading is to develop fluency at the child's present level. If he is reading at third grade level, he becomes a fast and easy reader of third grade books. He should read a lot of them. He is not urged to read harder ones. Fluency comes from doing what you can do easily, as in fluency at the piano or in any game. So the emphasis is on *lots of easy reading*, and *not on increase in skill* or ability.

On the other hand individualized reading is teaching reading. It is aimed at the learning of more sight vocabulary, more phonics, more word meaning, more sentence comprehension, and so on. It is teaching reading, though it is done with the emphasis on the learning rather than the teaching. So there is an enormous difference between recreational reading and the teaching of reading by the individualized method.

Starting

First, we must say that the teacher does not have to discuss with anyone the defects of her present plan. Some teachers have done this and find immediately that there are positive criticisms of group reading, such as uninteresting stories, waiting for others, and so on. But this is not helpful. Instead, let the teacher feature the advantages that individualized reading will give.

We also doubt the advisability of having a great deal of publicity when the individualized reading program is begun. After all, the teacher is starting a new experiment. She must neither promise too much nor expect too much. The new program should be discussed as an experiment and not as a force that will change the entire curriculum. Individualized reading should be started gradually and should carry its own conviction.

Luckily, individualized reading can be begun gradually. One does not need to plunge into it over one's head. Two methods of beginning are possible, one using a part of the children, and the other using part of the time. If one is following the group method, one can start with the fast group. When their time comes, simply explain that each is to be reading a different book of his own choice, and that the teacher is there to help with hard words, with puzzling ideas, and so on. This group will quickly make selections. Its members will immediately read on their own. And there will be enough asking for help to keep the teacher busy, as soon as the children realize that she actually means to help, and not to criticize.

In this way a small group can start, either sitting before the teacher as usual and stepping up to her side for help, or they can start at their seats, coming to the teacher or raising their hands for her to come to them. In this way the procedure can become easy and habitual. The rest of the room can see what it is and how it works. Very soon, the other groups too will be asking for a chance to read books of their own choice.

A method of starting individualized reading by using only part of the time is to have the regularly scheduled group reading and then, after an explanation, use one or two days a week for individualized reading. In this way the teacher can keep her hand on the situation through the groups while she is trying out how to manage the individualized reading. Then she may shift into using the group sessions for emphasis on particular skills, such as sounding attack, use of context, discovery of meanings, finding of the author's plan, and so on. These skills will be carried over into the individualized reading periods. Later on, the teacher may want to shift her main emphasis to individualized reading and she will then change her group plan into using groups that need certain skills rather than groups based on reading level. Thus a full-fledged individualized reading program may be arrived at.

How many books are needed?

On the problem of how many books, we hear answers of all kinds, and we must conclude that on the ingenuity of the teacher depends the main solution. What teachers actually do is to get books of all kinds from all possible sources. One

teacher asks the school office for everything it has that might be suited to the grade or two or three grades below. One teacher gets from the library twenty-five or thirty books, whatever the amount they are willing to lend. One teacher has books brought from home to be loaned to the room. Or she gets a little money and buys books. Or a teacher collects children's magazines that have been used or orders school newspapers.

Some persons say that there should be at least five books per child, but this number is just a guess. The number is not so important as the interest. Fewer books are all right if they are all interesting. Some say we should study the interests of each child and provide for each one. Others say that in spite of any special interests, all children have certain interests and so can be provided for. One thing at least all are agreed upon. The books must be largely easy. There are always enough hard books for the good readers. It is the poor readers who do not have enough books.

After the start, it will be found that a constant supply of new books is needed. Children who are reading what they can read and what they want to read, use a lot of books. But when the enthusiasm is there, ways of getting books appear.

Selection by the children

The basis of all individualized reading is the conviction that children may be quite passive toward a book that is chosen *for* them, but they are *active* learners in attacking a book that they *want* to read and that they think they *can* read. This active attack on the part of the children is the core of the matter. But to get it, there must be *self-selection* by the children from whatever books are available.

It is this point of selection that many teachers are afraid of. They fear that there will be pandemonium, that there will be wasting of time, that there will be bothering of one another, that there will be noise and confusion, such as they are unwilling to have in a schoolroom. Will there be these things? How can they be avoided?

There must be preparation of the children. All are agreed that if individualized reading is to be started right, there must be much discussion of it beforehand *with* the children. The children must fully understand the idea. They must know just what will be done. They must think beforehand of the problem of selecting the right book. They should even talk about what the right book would be, how they would tell, how much they would have to read of it to find out, and so on.

The children should even talk about the way the books will be arranged. What kind of books will they be! How are they to look them over? Should they stand at a shelf and look over a book or should they go sit down and try it out? Do they want a little book that they soon get through, or do they want a "real book" that will keep them interested for some time?

Children even need to be convinced that the teacher actually means that they should read for interest and information. They may have thought, during all their school lives, that reading was just to please the teacher. Now they must realize that they read for themselves. They read to find out. The teacher really means that *they* are managing it. She really means that she will let them read what they want.

Finally, the children need to discuss what they will do when they come to a word they do not know. Will they try to sound? Will they use the context? Will they see a familiar part? Or will they just skip and go on? Suppose they skip. If they do, they will be doing "reading with holes in it." Do they want to do this? What will they learn from doing that?

The children must be told exactly when

to ask for help and just how to do it. If several want help at once, what should they do? Should they just raise their hands and wait and do nothing, or go on and look for a chance to get the teacher's help on the word that they passed? This depends, of course, on what the particular teacher wants them to do, upon the size of the class, and so on. But there needs to be a clear understanding of the procedure.

This preparation may take some time, but the teacher needs to have the children quite clear about the experiment, and quite accustomed to the idea. She may even wait for enthusiasm to build up and until she is eagerly asked to begin.

The physical setup must help selection. If all the books for selection are on one small shelf, there will be crowding and confusion. If they are all on one table, there will be a lot of pushing and interference. So the teacher must plan an arrangement that will keep the children from crowding one another, and that will give them a chance to really look at the books. One plan is to distribute the books around the room on shelves and tables and let the children move from one place to another. They can do so without disturbing one another.

Some teachers will try to help by sorting the books by reading difficulty, thus helping the child who is selecting to find a book he can read. But one must be careful not to label some children as poor readers by doing this. Some teachers will try to arrange the books by topics, stories, science, travel, or what not. This may help if a child has a decided preference, but it may keep them from browsing as they should.

It is a good thing for a teacher to say that each child must show her the book he has selected. He can read some of it to find out if it is the right one, but when he has decided, he should show it to her. The teacher does this primarily to keep informed of what each child is doing. She does not do it to limit selection. Of course, if a child unwittingly chooses a book she knows he will not like, she may tell him something about it. If a child chooses a book that is too hard, she might tell him to read some of it before deciding. She may think a child has chosen a book that is too easy, but it is a good thing to let him try it anyway. If it is really too easy, she can shift him later rather than block his choice at the start. But the teacher should give to all the idea that her approval is necessary. That very idea will have a guiding effect.

Many teachers have noted that children have what is called a rhythm in their selection of hard and easy. A child may read several easy books and then decide to tackle a hard one. Or a child may work on hard books and then decide to have an easy one for a change. There is also a rhythm of fiction and nonfiction. Though some children may want to stay with one kind or the other, we find many children fluctuate between them, going from fiction to fact and back again. In other words, interests change and must be allowed a change. That is a kind of growth.

Must a child stick by a selection? We do not want children to get the idea that they can skip from one book to another; nor do we want to insist that a child stay with a book even though he finds it is too hard or that he does not like it. So we had better give all the idea that they should choose a book carefully, and then "give the book a chance." What "give the book a chance" means will vary with individuals. If a child wants to drop a choice too easily, we will insist that he keep on. If a child is obviously laboring and finding too many difficulties, we may suggest a change.

One rule that is common is that during the first period a child will not browse all the time. He will rather quickly settle

on a book to be tried out and keep to that book for that period. He must "settle on something" even though he knows it may not be the perfect book. Then in the next period he can try for a better one. This will ensure some real reading each period, and not a continual "looking."

Some children just cannot make up their minds. Still others like to browse and will avoid settling down. Both sorts will tend to cause confusion and will not benefit from continual "looking." In both these cases, the teacher will give all the lee-way she thinks is beneficial. Then she herself may just choose a book for the child and have him sit down to read it. This is with the understanding, of course, that he is "giving the book a chance," and that next time he can try another.

Of course, there will be some children who just cannot find the "perfect book." Their tastes are too special, or too vague. Or the supply of books is not varied enough. Such children will just do the best they can. If a book is not exactly the right one, isn't it the best there is on the shelves? If so, let us just make the best of it and go ahead and read.

What will the teacher do?

The moving-about method suits some situations. In some situations, the children, when they come to a difficulty or have a question, raise their hands. The teacher moves about the room, going from child to child to give the needed help. Here a number of things happen. *First,* too many hands are raised, and the teacher cannot get to all, and so some just sit with their hands up and do not read. This situation may cause the teacher to tell the children when they want help to hold up a hand, but to go right on reading. She will get to them. *Second,* some children will ask for too much help, and the teacher must discourage this asking. *Third,* other children will never ask for help, and the teacher may have to ask them to read to her to see if they really are getting all the words and thoughts.

Moving about usually becomes merely telling words or reminding of sounds, and so on. The situation is not right for listening to reading. So, many teachers do not believe in this device, and use another.

The "Read-to-the-teacher" method is most common. Many teachers sit at their desks or at a table and call the children to them, one at a time. The child brings his book and in a low tone reads to the teacher. She hears what he is doing, what troubles he has, and so on. She asks questions or makes suggestions. The talking is kept low so as not to disturb others.

Two difficulties are inherent in the "read to the teacher" method. *First,* most of the children do not receive help *during* their reading. They must wait until their turn comes to read to the teacher. Meantime, they have to guess and skip as best they can. Second, the reading to the teacher is short and may not reveal enough of the difficulties. The teacher is trying to keep the time short so as to get to more children.

Which of these methods is followed depends, of course, on the age of the children, their preparation for self-help, and the teacher's feeling as to which works best. A teacher might shift from one to the other from time to time to discover which works best for her.

The Help-One-Another Method is promising. Many teachers find that much help can be given by children to one another. This is the more possible if the seating puts friends together and those friends are of different reading ability. Then it is easy for a child to point to a word, lean across the aisle, and have the friend just say the word. In this way reading can be kept going and understanding and interest

increased. Sometimes a reader and a helper can go off to a corner where they will not be likely to disturb others. Sometimes a helper can be trained to the point where he will ask, "What do *you* think it is?" in order to encourage the poor reader to try to sound. But this Help-One-Another method requires good management not to become a disturbance to those reading.

Sometimes members can be chosen helpers and "move about" as the teacher does, or sit at a table and have children come to them. Sometimes these helpers can be children from a higher grade. Their choice is most important, and they can usually just act as listeners.

Will the teacher keep records?

It is always recommended that the teacher keep some records of each child's difficulties. She might have a card for each, or make notes on a pad and later put the notes under names. She can list (1) words asked about, (2) sounding difficulties, (3) meaning difficulties, and so on. It helps if there is a sheet for each child, that is ruled into columns for the various kinds of notes to be made. We cannot tell, however, how fully anyone follows this advice. Under the pressure of keeping all the children going, perhaps the mental notes are most important. By these the teacher can be guided as to what problems need the special class sessions for special teaching.

One may wonder why reports on individualized reading programs usually emphasize that the teacher must keep records on each child's performance when the same is not urged for the group system. If the teacher hears children read aloud one after another at her desk, how different is this from hearing children read aloud one after another when sitting in a group? The teacher with a group usually remembers each child's difficulties; there is no doubt that the teacher hearing individualized reading does the same. Of course, if there is time for the record keeping, it would be very helpful. But the time taken to keep records can always be given to helping children. So record keeping must not be emphasized to a point where it hinders teaching.

The child's records

The greatest incentive to learning is to know what it is that you are trying to learn and how well you are progressing. This is very true of individualized reading. The child must realize that he is supposed to be learning certain things, and he must know that he is progressing in them.

To this end, children are asked to keep records of a number of things. *First*, there is the record of the books and pages read. Each child has a notebook or sheet on which he records each of the books, with title, author, and so on, including the number of pages read. To this can be added the time taken, so that the child can get an idea of his rate of reading.

Second, the child usually keeps a record of his evaluation of the books. One way is to have a reading record card which shows the child's name, the title and author, and the child's reaction on interest and on difficulty. He merely marks one item in a set such as "very interesting," "interesting" "all right" and "not very interesting." He also marks one of these "too hard," "all right" and "easy."

Third, the child knows that he is learning word meanings, and so he lists each day a certain number of interesting new words that he has learned. This is to direct attention to these words and to see that they are not just skipped.

Fourth, the child knows that he is learning sounding. He may list the words that he has sounded out, or he lists new sounding rules that he has learned or former rules that he has used most. To do this

intelligently he needs to be given a list of the steps in learning sounding.

Fifth, the child lists some new *ideas* he has learned from reading. This is to direct attention to this phase of reading. The teacher may decide if the record is to be of one idea or more.

This kind of record keeping is very important if learning is actually to take place. And time must be given near the end of the reading period for making the records. The teacher will stop all reading and say, "It is time now to make your records," and see that all get to work on them.

The sharing period

The amount of sharing to be done is largely a matter of how important the teacher feels sharing to be and of how much time there is. Some classes "share" the last ten minutes of each day. The teacher may decide that on one day this is to be sharing of new word meanings, on another day it is to be sharing of new ideas, on another day it is to be sharing of sounding used, and so on. Not everything can be shared in one day.

Here is an opportunity for real audience reading. There may be a little time given to listening to some child who has found a fascinating bit in his book. This may be a description. It may be a poem. It may be an exciting incident. It may be an interesting fact. Experience will tell how to lead the children to choose just the right things, to limit the amount they will read, to read with expression and genuine interest, and so on.

In advanced grades, sharing can be more ambitious. A sixth grade decided to write advertisements for a book, a review of it, to make a book jacket, to investigate the author, to write a poem on the same subject, to describe characters, to dramatize a scene, and so on. How far this sharing should go depends always on how important the teacher feels it to be and how much time she wishes to take for it.

Who is to share is another difficulty. The expressive children will want to talk. The shy ones will not. The teacher will want volunteers, but if the wrong ones volunteer, she will call on those she wants to talk. Not all can participate because of lack of time. Choosing the children is always a problem.

One type of sharing is done through an activity that uses what is read about. An art period can include illustrating stories read. A composition period can feature comments on books read or on people read about. A science period can feature science facts from the reading period, and so on. All the children take part in the activity and all see the results.

But individualized reading is not an activity especially designed for sharing. Some sharing of reading will maintain the social viewpoint, but the language side of sharing can also be taken care of in some other subject, such as the social sciences.

The first grade

It is very natural for a first grade teacher to be skeptical about individualizing reading. How can children do individualized reading when they cannot read? But the situation is not as difficult as it might seem.

First of all, in Grade One there is much teaching of sight words by labels, announcements on the board, experience charts, and so on. In addition, there are many children who are helped at home. And then there are the repeaters who know a good many words. All these three facts mean that from the very beginning of book work, there are some first graders who can read some very easy books. The first grade teacher can have these children do individualized reading, either each reading to her aloud from his own

book, or each reading his own book to himself, asking help from her. This would be a small group of five or more. The other children might meet in their usual reading groups, getting help in learning sight vocabulary.

Second, reading in first grade is not the same as reading later on. There is a lot of picture reading that the children in Grade One think of as reading. First graders can sit for a long time reading a book, going through it page by page, getting the story mostly from the pictures. This in individualized reading that gets interest and enthusiasm. It may not get much word knowledge, but this will be taken care of in group situations.

Third, in Grade One, teacher control may be needed by many children who cannot be held by the appeal of a book. So in this grade, the greater immaturity means more group work so that the teacher can supervise better. But we must not underestimate the ability of many first graders to work on their own. More could do it if they were trained to do so.

All this means that in first grade, group work can be done for all, but individualized reading for some. Gradually, the number doing individualized reading can be increased. This will mean more rapid progress for them, and no less progress for those in the groups. It is understood that in all first grade activities except reading, the usual group procedures would go on.

Results of reading tests

We have a good many experiments in comparing individualized reading with group reading, but we need to remember, in considering all of them, the five requirements for good school research.

1. Compare equal teachers, working equally hard.
2. Compare children of equal background and equal intelligence.
3. Be sure there was equal time and emphasis.
4. Watch the size of class.
5. Beware of misleading averages.
6. Watch for unmeasured results.

Suppose we look at the individualized reading experiments from this point of view. *First,* we cannot compare teachers using this method with the record of average teachers as shown in a national norm. Undoubtedly the teachers experimenting with individualized reading were good teachers and worked very hard. National norms do not come from such work. Instead we need to consider what would result with these *same* teachers, working *equally hard* with groups.

Second, individualized reading has been used almost entirely in favored schools, where the children are of exceptional ability and background. Such children are highly motivated. They love to read. The individualized method works. But what about children from homes hostile to the schools who hate reading and the school? We really do not know what happens with these children. Perhaps if individualized reading got started with them, they would do much better. But could one start it?

Third, daily schedules of equal time are misleading. In so many schools they say a child does "an hour's work on reading a day," when they mean he is 20 minutes before the teacher, 20 minutes with a workbook in front of him, and 20 minutes with a book at his seat. Is this 60 minutes of highly motivated reading such as the 60 minutes of individualized reading with an interesting book of his own level of difficulty and with a teacher to help any moment? Likewise, a teacher who starts individualized reading makes a project of it into which all the children enter. They are enthusiastic. So they work hard. Are all the children in the three-group plan

enthusiastic? So we do not really find equal time and emphasis in the studies.

Fourth, all records of studies are in averages. This is misleading because we are concerned with every last child, from the top to the bottom. Of what value is it if the average goes up, but some children at the bottom sink even lower into failure? Likewise, any system which liberates the fast to read ahead and improve their skill, will raise the average of the group, even if it is only the fast ones who improve. So averages must be received with care, and we must examine the full range from the slowest to the highest.

Fifth, the one big *unmeasured result* of individualized reading, they tell us, is that children become enthusiastic about reading. But we have no test to measure enthusiasm for reading. Likewise, the one big drawback of the group system, they say, is the discouragement of the slow. But is there a test for discouragement? There is also the social side of reading, on which we have commented. There is no test for this, and so if individualized reading changes the social feeling, we can never tell it from tests. Finally, which method is harder for the teacher? We have no test for this. So let us always watch for unmeasured results.

Making allowances for all of this, experiments on individualized reading always show some favorable result in reading scores for the individualized method. We need to know if this is true for all teachers and all kinds of schools, for all kinds of children, for the fast and also the slow, and after a period of time when the first enthusiasm has had time to wear off. We also want to know more about the "side effects" of both kinds of reading.

Of one thing we can be sure, however. The method of individualized reading surely needs many and long-continued tryouts and study. There is so much good to be said about it, regardless of criticisms. But this does not mean it will be, or that anything will be, the one and only method of teaching reading. It seems likely, instead, to take its place in the repertory of the skilled teacher of reading, and as such to give valuable results for the children.

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